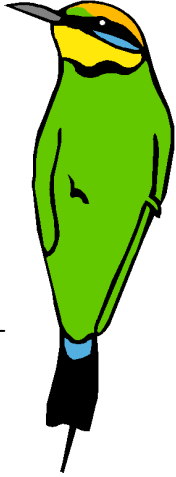


# GARDEN FOR WILDLIFE

Firstly, I'd like to introduce myself as the new Garden for Wildlife Coordinator. I'm looking forward to continuing the amazing work Heidi has been doing on the program. Having moved to Alice Springs from NSW, with a background in Conservation and Land Management and bush regeneration, I'm eager to expand my knowledge about the beautiful and diverse area you all live in. Hopefully I'll meet all of you at some stage,

Danielle O'Hara



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## **Collecting and Propagating Seeds of Mulga and Witchetty Bush**

**By Tim Collins, Alice Springs Desert Park**

Mulga (*Acacia aneura*) and Witchetty Bush (*Acacia kempeana*) are large shrubs with excellent value as habitat, and in a garden. Collecting seeds and propagating plants is relatively straightforward, but you should follow a few simple rules so that you are well prepared and avoid any pitfalls.

**Before collecting seeds or cuttings from native plants, *naturally occurring or growing in the wild*, you must acquire a permit from The Department of Natural Resources Environment and The Arts (NRETA).**

Permit application forms can be obtained from the internet:

(<http://www.nt.gov.au/nreta/wildlife/permits/index.html>)

Or, by contacting:

### **Parks and Wildlife Service Permits Office**

Ground Floor, Goyder Centre

Chung Wah Terrace

PO Box 496

Palmerston NT 0830

Tel: (+61 8) 8999 4795 or (+61 8) 8999 4814

Fax: (+61 8) 8999 4524

Email: [pwpermits.nreta@nt.gov.au](mailto:pwpermits.nreta@nt.gov.au)

Once you have obtained the necessary permits, or if you are collecting from a cultivated plant, your powers of observation will be required.

Both Mulga and Witchetty Bush have what is termed “dehiscent” seeds. That is, the seeds are released from the pods when they become ripe. Other local plants with dehiscent seeds are Corkwoods, Sennas, Bloodwoods and most Acacias and Eucalypts.

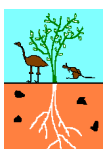
Being observant, you will find that not all of the plants in a population will produce seeds in a season. Mulga and Witchetty produce seeds in pods which become dry and turn light brown when the seeds are ready. After good rainfall Mulga and Witchetty flower and if there is sufficient soil moisture or good following rains, seed pods will form. Without the necessary rainfall the flowers will not set seed. Cultivated plants will regularly flower and set seed, unlike their wild counterparts.

Ripe seeds are dark brown and have a very hard seedcoat. Unripe seeds are usually green and larger than when ripe. This is due to the drying of the seeds as they approach ripeness – the seeds actually shrink.

Ripe seeds should be collected by hand and placed in paper or cloth bags. Plastic bags should be avoided as seeds can sweat and become mouldy in a few days. Good quality seeds, stored in paper bags away from mice and extremes of temperature, can remain viable for many decades, but don't collect more than you need as seeds are food for many different animals. A rule of thumb would be to take no more than 20% of seeds on a plant. Mulga and Witchetty can be germinated by pre-treating the seeds with boiling water. Simply boil the kettle and pour the hot water over the seeds. Leave the seeds to soak overnight and then sow into pots or punnets of good quality “seed raising media”. This is important as many seeds are killed by soil fungi. Seed raising media can be bought relatively cheaply at most garden centres or nurseries. Place the pots in an area protected from the sun and wind, as they are vulnerable to drying which can kill them. Transfer individual seedlings into small pots after they have germinated and keep them well watered. Although these plants grow in the desert, they usually only reproduce in years of above-average rainfall and so home-grown plants need daily watering.

Plants should be ready to plant-out in April/May if you sow the seeds in January/February.

By sowing the seeds in mid-summer you can take advantage of their faster summer growth and establish the plants in your garden as the weather cools.



## Native plants outside their natural range can also be invasive

*It isn't that I don't like*

*European trees.*

*Why, my great-grandfather came from...*

*Some of my best friends are...*

*But huddled together*

*in clumps and plantations*

*or lining the roads*

*like an official welcome*

*they look a bit lonely*

*slightly on guard, rather formal,*

*wishing the visit was over;*

*like the staff of an Embassy*

*at a party they don't really trust.*

(Judith Wright, *Oaks etc*, 1976)

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### News...

- The next Australia Plant Society meeting is on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Alice Quamby will be talking on the Millennium Seed Bank. The Millennium Seed Bank is the world's largest native seed bank and seed bank research facility. It is designed specifically for the conservation of wild species. The Millennium Seed Bank Project aims to store seeds from 10% of the world's arid and semi arid regions (about 24 000 species) by the year 2010
- Olive Pink Botanic Gardens are having a native plant sale on May 10<sup>th</sup>. 8 am - 11.30 am. Huge range of local native plants including hard-to-find species and rare plants. Ph 8952 2154
- If you have not returned your Garden for Wildlife registration form, please do so as we would like to deliver your membership pack soon, visit <http://www.lowecol.com.au/lfw/gfwregister.htm> to download the simplified version.

